

# THE Center for Education Reform



1001 Connecticut Avenue, NW  
Suite 204 • Washington, DC 20036

Tel 202-822-9000  
Fax 202-822-5077

## KNOW WHO WILL FIGHT FOR YOUR CHILDREN

By Jeanne Allen

President, Center for Education Reform

(616 Words)

Recent concerns about declining student achievement and deteriorating schools - at the local, state and national levels -- have strengthened the cry for reevaluation and reform of our nation's education system. The viewpoint on educational issues of both elected and appointed School Board members, state legislators and even county officials has been, or likely soon will be, the focal point of community discussions on how to improve our schools to make them the best.

All states and communities differ in their needs and approaches to education reform. Moreover, today school boards and other governing authorities are often extremely limited in what they can do to improve schools. Government oversight and opposition from vested interests often hamstring a board's ability to make substantial changes, but it is still critical that these governing bodies take a strong leadership role in introducing new and effective ideas to their communities, and in working to implement real reform. Because of this, knowing as much as you can about your local candidates and members is crucial.

### Getting the Answers

It is important not only to know where the candidates stand, but to make sure the right questions get asked, and to help bring issues important to you and the community to the forefront of public discussion.

**Accountability** -- Should teachers whose students repeatedly fail to learn be held accountable? Accountability becomes a difficult issue if and when ineffective teachers cannot be removed from their jobs. In many cases, these teachers are members of powerful special interest groups, like the AFT or NEA, and their positions become nearly untouchable. The processes involved in the removal of bad teachers almost seem designed to protect the teachers and not the ones being harmed by ineffectual, uninterested and bad teachers, our children.

**Parents** -- What roles do parents play in the educational process? Does your local representative welcome and invite parental involvement and interaction in their proceedings? Are all deliberations and decisions made in the open and under public scrutiny? Do you know where members or candidates send their own children to school?

**Charter Schools** -- Do you approve of public schools being run independent of district or county supervision? Should parents have the right to start one? Today, 34 states plus the District of Columbia have passed charter school legislation. The number of these schools has jumped dramatically to over 1200 today, from just 1 in 1992. These schools serve over 300,000 students nationwide. In the years since the first charter school opened its doors, these schools have attained measurable success and in most instances have surpassed both expectations and their traditional

public school counterparts.

Standardized testing -- Is the use of standardized tests a valid and fair measure of academic achievement of our students? Is it fair to compare the results of student achievement year to year within a single school and between different schools within a district?

Advisors -- What organizations will your candidate or elected representative rely upon most heavily for advice on educational matters -- Parents? Unions? PTAs? Community and Civic Groups? Some of these groups have specific and vested interest in the direction taken by legislators and school board members. Not every decision is beneficial to the child. This is a very important question as it may also be an indication of loyalty. Is this loyalty to an organization that protects jobs or one that benefits our kids?

Remember, for the next few years the people elected to represent you, at both the local and state level, will play a critical role in the direction your children's education will take. It is up to each parent to learn how each member or candidate stands on education issues important to you.

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